

Echo

Travellers eye up land earmarked for housing

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By Jon Austin

HUNDREDS of travellers facing eviction want to set up home on land earmarked for up to 4,500 homes.

About 100 families from Dale Farm, Crays Hill, and Hovefields, Wickford, are eyeing up a move to Gardiners Lane South, Basildon.

Earlier this month the Echo revealed the Government's Homes and Communities Agency, which owns most of the land, had shelved plans for a housing estate for at least five years.

This prompted Richard Sheridan, spokesman for Dale Farm, to approach the Government to see if it would back an application to develop a temporary site and stop any evictions.

Yesterday, he wrote to government officials saying the travellers' plan was to draw up a planning application for a mobile home park on land.

Unlike Dale Farm, the land is designated for housing and is not in the green belt.

He wrote: "As the whole development, though passed, is to be delayed for at least five years we think it is reasonable to expect a favourable response to our bid to set up a temporary mobile home park as an alternative for the 100 or so families. I would like to have your comments and know whether the Government would welcome further feedback from the Dale Farm Housing Association."

His letter came the same day he contacted Basildon Council chiefs to warn if the families were evicted they would set up makeshift camps in Basildon.

The Homes and Communities Agency has so far refused to comment, claiming it can only give out factual information in the run-up to a general election.

Tony Ball, council leader, said any application which came forward would have to be considered on its merits. However, he said: "My personal view is that it is against the Government guidelines.

"They would have to put in a lot of supplies and infrastructure.

"Also, given the fact John Prescott gave them two years temporary permission at Dale Farm and no-one moved off, how temporary is temporary given their track record?"

He said Basildon had more than 110 legal pitches and other councils should provide the pitches.

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